

FARM LABORERS

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A SERMON
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*"I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, neither he who waters, but God that gives the increase. Now he that plants and he that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: you are God's husbandry."
1 Corinthians 3:6-9.*

IN all ages since the fall there has been a tendency in the human heart to forget God and get away from Him. Idolatry has been the sin of all nations, including God's favored people, the Jews, and including certain persons who call themselves Christians, and yet make idols out of crosses and images. This vicious principle of ignoring God, and setting up something between our minds and our Creator, crops up everywhere, in every department of thought. When men study the works of God in nature, they often hang up a veil to hide the great Worker. Because God acts in a certain way, they call His method of action a law, and straightway they speak of these laws as if they were forces and powers in and of themselves, and thus God is banished out of His own universe, and His place is taken up in the scientific world by idols called, "natural laws."

Take the region of providence, and here you find persons, instead of seeing the hand of God everywhere, looking to second causes—seeking causes of prosperity and becoming very despondent if they do not appear to exist. Or viewing the agents of affliction, and becoming angry against them, instead of bowing before the God who has used them for correction. It is easy to make idols out of second causes and to forget the God who is everywhere present, causing all things to work together for good. That this evil principle should intrude into the church is very sad and yet it is with difficulty excluded. You may bar all your doors as fast as you please, but the idol-makers will come in with their shrines.

In the instance of the church at Corinth, Paul found the brethren forgetting their God and Savior in their high esteem for certain preachers. Instead of all saying, "We are Christ's disciples," and uniting together to promote the common cause, they made parties and one said, "Paul, who founded this church, is to be had in the greatest reverence, and we are of Paul." Others replied, "But Apollos is more eloquent than the apostle, and by him we have been edified till we have gone beyond Paul, and therefore we are of Apollos." While a third party declared that they were of no sect whatever, for they were "brethren" and were "of Christ."

These last, I suspect, either ignored or denounced the other two parties and would not commune with them, in order to testify against their sectarianism and to promote unity. I only surmise this from the conduct of those "brethren" who in our day take the Corinthians to be their model, and cut off everybody else, being more exclusive than any other sect in Christendom. The apostle warns the saints in Corinth against this—he brings the Lord before their minds and bids them remember that if Paul plants and Apollos waters, still it is God that gives the increase. Since they think so highly of men, he will have it that "neither he that plants is anything nor he that waters anything" but God that gives the increase is everything.

See to it, dear friends, that you set the Lord always before you in this church and in all your churches. Know them that labor among you and esteem them highly in love for their work's sake, but do

not make them your dependence. Recollect that the ablest ministers, the most successful evangelists, the most profound teachers are, after all, nothing but laborers on God's farm—"laborers together with God." Let your mind be set upon the Master and not upon the servants, and do not say, "We are for this man because he plants," and "We are for the other because he waters," and "We"—a third party—"are for nobody at all." But let us join in ascribing all honor and praise unto God who works all our works in us, since every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, to whom be glory world without end.

I shall begin at the end of my text because, I find it to be the easiest way of mapping out my discourse. We shall first remark that *the church is God's farm*—"You are God's husbandry." In the margin of the revised version we read, "You are God's tilled ground," and that is the very expression for me. "You are God's tilled ground," or farm. After we have spoken of the farm, we will next say a little upon the fact that *He employs laborers* on the farm. And when we have looked at the laborers—such poor fellows as they are—we will remember that *God Himself is the great worker*—"We are laborers together with God."

I. We begin by considering that THE CHURCH IS GOD'S FARM.

The Lord has made the church of His sovereign *choice* to be His own by *purchase*, having paid for it a price immense. "The LORD's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." Because the Lord's portion was under mortgage, therefore the only-begotten Son laid down His life as the purchase price and redeemed His people to be the Lord's portion forever and ever. Henceforth it is said to all believers, "You are not your own; you are bought with a price." Every acre of God's farm cost the Savior bloody sweat, yea, the blood of His heart. He loved us and gave Himself for us—that is the price He paid.

What a ransom! The death of Jesus has sometimes almost seemed too high a price to pay for such poor land as we are, but the Lord having set His eye and heart upon His people would not draw back, but completed the redemption of the purchased possession. Henceforth the church is God's freehold and He has the title deeds of it, yea, of you and of me, for we belong alone to Him and we are glad to own the fact—"I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine." The church is God's farm by choice and purchase.

And now He has made it His by *enclosure*. It lay exposed aforetime as part of an open common, bare and barren, covered with thorns and thistles, and the haunt of every wild beast, for we were, "by nature the children of wrath, even as others." We were part of the dreary desert till divine foreknowledge surveyed the waste, and electing love marked out its portion with a full line of grace, and thus set us apart to be the Lord's own estate forever. In due time effectual grace came forth with power and separated us from the rest of mankind, as fields are hedged and ditched to part them from the open heath.

Has not the Lord declared that He has chosen His vineyard and fenced it? Has He not said, "I will be a wall of fire round about you, and a glory in the midst"?

*"We are a garden wall'd around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground.
A little spot, enclosed by grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness."*

The Lord has also made this farm evidently His own by *cultivation*. What more could He have done for His farm? He has totally changed the nature of the soil—from being barren, He has made it a fruitful land. He has plowed it, and dug it, and fattened it, and watered it, and planted it with all manner of flowers and fruits. It has already brought forth to Him many a pleasant fruit, and there are brighter times to come, when angels shall shout the harvest home, and Christ "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

This farm is kept what it is, as well as made what it is, by God's continual *protection*. Not only did He enclose it and work upon it by His miraculous power to make it His own farm, but He continually maintains possession of it. "I the LORD do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it I will keep it night and day." If it were not for God's continual power, her hedges would soon be thrown down and wild beasts would devour her fields. Wicked hands are always trying to break down her walls and lay her waste again, so that there should be no true church in the world, but the Lord is jealous for His land and will not allow it to be destroyed. If the church were to left of God, she would become a howling wilderness, but she shall not come to such an end.

A church would not long remain a church if God did not preserve it unto Himself. What if God should say, "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: and I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it." What a wilderness it would become. What says He? "Go you now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." Go you to Jerusalem, where of old was the city of His glory and the shrine of His dwelling, and what is left there today? Go you to Rome, where once Paul preached the Gospel with power, what is it now, but the center of idolatry?

The Lord may remove the candlestick and leave a place that was bright as day to become black as darkness itself. Hence God's farm remains a farm because He is always in it to prevent its returning to its former wildness. Omnipotent power is as necessary to keep the fields of the church under cultivation as to reclaim them at the first.

Inasmuch as the church is God's own farm, *He expects to receive a harvest from it*. He comes to us looking for sheaves, where He has sowed so plentifully. The world is a waste and He looks for nothing from it—but we are tilled land and therefore a harvest is due from us. Barrenness suits the moorland, but to a farm it would be a great discredit. Love looks for returns of love. Grace given demands gracious fruit.

Watered with the drops of the Savior's bloody sweat shall we not bring forth a hundredfold to His praise? Kept by the eternal Spirit of God, shall there not be produced in us fruits to His glory? The Lord's husbandry upon us has shown a great expenditure of cost, and labor, and thought—ought there not to be a proportionate return? Ought not the Lord to have a harvest of obedience, a harvest of holiness, a harvest of usefulness, a harvest of praise? Shall it not be so?

I think some churches forget that an increase is expected from every field of the Lord's farm, for they never have a harvest or even look for one. The people come together and take their seats on Sunday and listen to sermons—that is, when they do not go to sleep—the sacraments are celebrated, a little money is contributed, a few poor folk are relieved, and affairs crawl along at a snail's pace. As to affecting the whole village, or endeavoring to bring the surrounding population to Christ, I do not think it has occurred to some churches to attempt it—and when certain warmer spirits seek to bring sinners to Jesus, the older and more prudent folks fetch wet blankets and use them with very great effect so that every sign of enthusiasm is damped down.

Brethren, such things ought not to be. I conceive that if there were no Christians in England but the members of our baptized churches, these would suffice for God's great designs of mercy, if they were once awakened to real labor. Alas, the loiterers are many, but the laborers are few. Look, my brethren, at the number of Nonconforming churches in this land and at the earnest ministers remaining in the Establishment, and if these were more fully quickened into spiritual life, would there not be workmen enough on the home farm? If all churches felt that they did not exist for mere existence sake, nor mere enjoyment's sake, would they not act differently?

Farmers do not plow their lands or sow their fields for amusement—they mean business and plow and sow because they desire a harvest. If this fact could but enter into the pates of some professors, surely they would look at things in a different light. But of late it has seemed as if we thought that God's

church was not expected to produce anything, but existed for her own comfort and personal benefit. Brethren, it must not be so. The great Husbandman must have some reward for His husbandry. Every field must yield its increase and the whole estate must bring forth to His praise. We join with the bride in the Song in saying, “My vineyard, which is mine, is before me: you, O Solomon, must have a thousand, and those that keep the fruit thereof two hundred.” But I come back to the place from which I started. This farm is, by choice, by purchase, by enclosure, by cultivation, by preservation entirely the Lord’s.

See, then, the injustice of allowing any of the laborers to call even a part of the estate his own. When a great man has a large farm of his own, what would he think if Hodge, the plowman, should say, “Look here, I plow this farm and therefore it is mine. I shall call this field, Hodge’s Acres?” “No,” says Hobbs, “I reaped that land last harvest and therefore it is mine, and I shall call it Hobbs’s Field.” What if all the other laborers became Hodgeites and Hobbsites, and so parceled out the farm among them? I think the landlord would soon eject the lot of them. The farm belongs to its owner and let it be called by his name. But it is absurd to call it by the names of the bumpkins who labor upon it. Is that a disrespectful title to apply to laborers? Why, I meant it for anybody and everybody whose name is used as the head of a party in the church.

I meant Luther, Calvin, Wesley, and other great men, for at their best, as compared with their Master, they are only farm laborers and we ought not to call parts of the farm by their names. Remember how Paul put it, “Who then is Paul and who is Apollos?” “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” The entire church belongs to Him who has chosen it in His sovereignty, bought it with His blood, fenced it by His grace, cultivated it by His wisdom, and preserved it by His power. There is still but one church on the face of the earth and those who love the Lord should keep this truth in mind.

Paul is a laborer, Apollos is a laborer, Cephas is a laborer, but the farm is not Paul’s, not so much as a rood of it, nor does a single parcel of land belong to Apollos, or the smallest allotment to Cephas—“You are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” The fact is that in this case the laborers belong to the land and not the land to the laborers—“For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas.” We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.

II. We now have to notice, as our second head, that THE GREAT HUSBANDMAN EMPLOYS LABORERS.

By human agency God ordinarily works out His designs. He can, if He pleases, by His Holy Spirit, get directly at the hearts of men, but that is His business and not ours. We have to do with such words as these—“It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” The Master’s commission is not, “Sit still and see the Spirit of God convert the nations,” but, “Go you into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.” This is God’s method in supplying the race with food.

In answer to the prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” He might have bidden the clouds drop manna, morning by morning, at each man’s door, but He sees that it is for our good to work, and so He uses the hands of the plowman and the sower for our supply. God might plow and sow His chosen farm, the church, by miracle, or by angels, but it is a great instance of His condescension towards His church that He blesses her through her own sons and daughters. He employs us for our own good, for we who are laborers in His fields receive much more good for ourselves than we bestow. Labor develops our spiritual muscle and keeps us in health. “Unto me,” says Paul, “who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

It is a grace, then. We find it to be a means of grace to our souls to preach the Gospel. I have heard it said and I believe there is some truth in it, that those who have to preach are under the temptation of getting so familiar with sacred things that they cease to feel their power. If this be true, it is an awful proof of our total depravity, for the more familiar we are with holy things the more we ought to be affected by them. And this I know, it has been the greatest means of grace to me to be bound by my office to study the Scriptures and wait upon God for help in expounding them.

Some of you who do not grow in grace by hearing other people might possibly get on better if you were yourselves to try and preach. At any rate, you might not be quite so faultfinding with other folks. When I hear a person say, "I cannot hear my minister," I suggest to him to buy a horn. "Oh," he says, "I do not mean that. I mean that I cannot enjoy his preaching." Then I say to him, "Preach yourself." "I cannot do that." Then do not find fault with those who are doing their best." Instead of blaming the plowman, just try a turn in the furrow yourself. Why grumble at the weeds? Take a hoe and work at them like a man. Do you think the hedges untidy? Put on the leather gloves and help us trim them.

Our great Master means that every laborer on His farm should receive some benefit from it, for He never muzzles the ox which treads out the corn. The laborer's daily bread comes out of the soil. Though he works not for himself, but for his Master, yet he still has his portion of food. In the Lord's granary there is seed for the sower, but there is also bread for the eater. However unselfishly we may serve God in the husbandry of His church, we are ourselves partakers of the fruit. It is a great condescension on God's part that He uses us at all, for we are poor tools at the best, and more hindrance than help.

The laborers employed by God are all *occupied upon needful work*. Notice, "I have planted, Apollos watered." Who beat the big drum or blew his own trumpet? Nobody. On God's farm none are kept for ornamental purposes. I have read some sermons which could only have been meant for show, for there was not a grain of Gospel in them. They were plows with the share left out, drills with no wheat in the box, clod-crushers made of butter. I do not believe that our God will ever pay wages to men who only walk about His grounds to show themselves. Fine orators who display their eloquence are more like gypsies who stray on the farm to pick up chickens than honest laborers who work to bring forth a crop for their master.

Why, many of the members of our churches live as if their only business on the farm was to pluck blackberries or gather wild flowers. They are great at finding fault with other people's plowing and mowing, but not a hand's turn will they do themselves. Come on, my good fellows. Why stand you all the day idle? The harvest is plenteous and the laborers are few. You who think yourselves more cultivated than ordinary people, if you are indeed Christians, must not strut about and despise those who are hard at work. If you do, I shall say, "That person has mistaken his master. He may probably be in the employ of some gentleman farmer, who cares more for show than profit, but our great Lord is practical—and on His estate His laborers attend to needful labor."

When you and I preach or teach it will be well if we say to ourselves, "What will be the use of what I am going to do? I am about to teach a difficult subject—will it do any good? I have chosen an abstruse point of theology—will it serve any purpose?" Brethren, a laborer may work very hard at a whim of his own and waste his labor, but this is folly. Some discourses do little more than show the difference between a tweedle-*dum* and a tweedle-*dee*—and what is the use of that? Suppose we sow the fields with sawdust, or sprinkle them with rosewater, what of that? Will God bless our moral essays and fine compositions and pretty passages?

Brethren, we must aim at usefulness—we must as laborers together with God be occupied with something that is worth doing. "I," says one, "have planted." It is well, for planting must be done. "I," answers another, "have watered." That is also good and necessary. See to it that you can each bring in a solid report, but let no man be content with the mere child's play of oratory, or the getting up of entertainments and such like.

On the Lord's farm *there is a division of labor*. Even Paul did not say, "I have planted and watered." No, Paul planted. And Apollos certainly could not say, "I have planted as well as watered." No, it was enough for him to attend to the watering. No one man has all gifts. How foolish, then, are they who say, "I enjoy So-and-So's ministry because he edifies the saints in doctrine, but when he was away the other Sunday I could not profit by the preacher because he was all for the conversion of sinners"?

Yes, he was planting. You have been planted a good while and do not need planting again, but you ought to be thankful that others were made partakers of the benefit. One sows and another reaps, and therefore instead of grumbling at the honest plowman because he did not bring a sickle with him, you

ought to have prayed for him that he might have strength to plow deep and break up hard hearts. Let us do all that we can and try to do more, for the more work we can turn our hands to, the better.

“You must not have too many irons in the fire,” said somebody. But I say, Put all the irons into the fire and if you have not fire enough, cry to God till you have. Set your whole soul on fire and keep all your irons hot. Yet you may find it wise to direct your strength into one line of things which you understand, so that by practice you may come to be skillful in it. Each man should find out his own work and do it with all his might.

Observe that, on God’s farm, *there is unity of purpose* among the laborers. Read the text. “Now he that plants and he that waters are one.” One Master has employed them, and though He may send them out at different times and to different parts of the farm, yet they are all one in being used for one end—to work for one harvest. In England we do not understand what is meant by watering, because the farmer could not water all his farm—but in the East a farmer waters almost every inch of ground. He would have no crop if he did not use all means for irrigating the fields. If you have ever been in Italy, Egypt, or Palestine, you will have seen a complete system of wells, pumps, wheels, buckets, channels, little streamlets, pipes, and so on, by which the water is carried all over the garden to every plant, otherwise in the extreme heat of the sun it would be dried up.

Planting needs wisdom and watering needs quite as much, and the piecing of these two works together needs that the laborers should be of one mind. It is a bad thing when laborers are at cross purposes and work against each other, and this evil is worse in the church than anywhere else. How can I plant with success if my helper will not water what I have planted? Or what is the use of my watering if nothing is planted? Husbandry is spoiled when foolish people undertake it and quarrel over it, for from sowing to reaping the work is one, and all must be done to one end. O for unity! Let us pull together all our days, even as we have done in this church hitherto.

We are called upon to notice in our text that *all the laborers put together are nothing at all*. “Neither he that plants is anything, neither he that waters.” The workmen are nothing at all without their master. All the laborers on a farm could not manage it if they had no one at their head, and all the preachers and Christian workers in the world can do nothing unless God be with them. Remember that every laborer on God’s farm has derived all his qualifications from God. No man knows how to plant or water souls except God does teach him from day to day. All these holy gifts are the grants of free grace. All the laborers work under God’s direction and arrangement, or they work in vain. They would not know when or how to do their work if their Master did not guide them by His Spirit, without whose help they cannot even think a good thought.

All God’s laborers must go to Him for their seed or else they will scatter tares. All good seed comes out of God’s granary. If we preach, it must be the true Word of God or nothing can come of it. More than that, all the strength that is in the laborer’s arms to sow the heavenly seed must be given by his Master. We cannot preach unless God be with us. A sermon is vain talk and dreary word-spinning unless the Holy Spirit enlivens it. He must give us both the preparation of the heart and the answer of the tongue, or we shall be as men who sow the wind. When the good seed is sown, the whole success of it rests with God. If He withholds the dew and the rain, the seed will never rise from the ground—and unless He shall shine upon it, the green ear will never ripen.

The human heart will remain barren, even though Paul himself should preach, unless God the Holy Ghost shall work with Paul and bless the Word to those that hear it. Therefore, since the increase is of God alone, put the laborers into their place. Do not make too much of us, for when we have done, all we are unprofitable servants.

Yet, though inspiration calls the laborers nothing, it makes a great deal of them, for it says, “Every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labor.” They are nothing and yet *they shall be rewarded* as if they were something. God works our good works in us and then rewards us for them.

Here we have mention of a personal service and a personal reward—“Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.” The reward is proportionate, not to the success, but to labor.

Many discouraged workers may be comforted with that expression. You are not to be paid by results, but by endeavors. You may have a stiff bit of clay to plow, or a dreary plot of land to sow, where stones, and birds, and thorns, and travelers, and a burning sun may all be leagued against the seed, but you are not accountable for these things—your reward shall be according to your labor. Some put a great deal of labor into a little field and make much out of it. Others use a great deal of labor throughout a long life and yet they see but small result, for it is written, “one sows and another reaps.” But the reaping man will not get all the reward, the sowing man shall receive his portion of the joy. The laborers are nobodies, but they shall enter into the joy of their Lord.

Unitedly, according to the text, *the workers have been successful*, and that is a great part of their reward. “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.” Frequently brethren say in their prayers, “A Paul may plant, an Apollos may water, but it is all in vain unless God gives the increase.” This is quite true, but another truth is too much overlooked, namely, that when Paul plants and Apollos waters, God does give the increase. We do not labor in vain. There would be no increase without God, but then we are not without God. When such men as Paul and Apollos plant and water, there is sure to be an increase. They are the right kind of laborers. They work in a right spirit and God is certain to bless them.

This is a great part of the laborers’ wages. I am rich, I am increased in goods, I have need of nothing when I see souls converted—my heart leaps for joy, my spirit is glad and I am ready to sing, “My soul does magnify the Lord”—but if it were ever to come to this, that I stood here Sunday after Sunday and saw no conversions, and the church rather going down than increasing, I should take it as an intimation that I had better take my plow somewhere else and scatter my seed on other soil. I would break my heart over non-success, or cry to God to break it, for he that works and gets no fruit is disheartened in his labor.

What would you farmers do? You are half inclined to give up, now, because you have had two or three bad years. But what would you do if you never saw a harvest at all? Why, you would clear out and be off to the western prairies or to the bush of the southern continent to see if the soil somewhere else would repay your labor. Do the same, brother ministers! If you have been at work in one spot for years and have not led souls to Jesus, pack up your traps and go somewhere else. Do not forever break your plow upon rocks. It is a big world and there is plenty of good ground somewhere—let us seek it. If they persecute you in one city, flee to another, and let the Word of God be published all the more widely by your moving about.

III. So much upon the laborers. Now for the main point again. GOD HIMSELF IS THE GREAT WORKER.

He may use what laborers He pleases, but the increase comes alone from Him. Brethren, you know it is so in natural things—the most skillful farmer cannot make the wheat germinate, and grow, and ripen. He cannot even preserve a single field till harvest time, for the farmer’s enemies are many and mighty. In husbandry there’s many a slip ‘twixt the cup and the lip, and when the farmer thinks he shall reap his crop, there are blights and mildews lingering about to rob him of his gains. God must give the increase. If any man is dependent on God, it is the husbandman, and through him we are all of us dependent upon God from year to year for the food by which we live. Even the king must live by the increase of the field.

God gives the increase in the barn and the hayrack—and in the spiritual farm it is even more so, for what can man do in this business? If any of you think that it is an easy thing to win a soul, I would like you to try. Suppose that without divine aid you should try to save a soul—you might as well attempt to make a world. Why, you cannot create a fly, how can you create a new heart and a right spirit? Regeneration is a great mystery—it is out of your reach. “The wind blows where it listeth, and you hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it comes, and whither it goes: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

What can you and I do in this matter? It is out of our pale and beyond our line. We can tell out the truth of God, but to apply that truth to the heart and conscience is quite another thing. I have stood here and preached Jesus Christ, preached my whole heart out, and yet I know that I have never produced any saving effect upon a single unregenerate man unless the spirit of God has taken the truth, and opened the heart, and placed the living seed within it. Experience teaches us this. Equally is it the Lord's work to keep the seed alive when it springs up. We think we have converts, and we are not long before we are disappointed in them. Many are like blossoms on our fruit trees—they are fair to look upon, but they do not come to anything. And others are like the many little fruits which fall off long before they have come to any size—a cold night or a blight will come and away go our hopes of a crop—it is just so with hopeful converts.

He who presides over a great church, and feels an agony for the souls of men, will soon be convinced that if God does not work, there will be no work done. We shall see no conversion, no sanctification, no final perseverance, no glory brought to God, no satisfaction for the passion of the Savior. Well said our Lord, "Without me you can do nothing."

What is the effect of all this upon your minds? Briefly I would draw certain practical lessons out of this important truth—the first is, if the whole farm of the church belongs exclusively to the great Master Worker, and the laborers are worth nothing without Him, *let this promote unity among all whom He employs*. If we are all under one Master, do not let us quarrel. It is a great pity when ministers harshly criticize one another and when Sunday school teachers do the same. It is a miserable business when we cannot bear to see good being done by those of a different denomination who work in ways of their own.

If a new laborer comes on the farm and he wears a coat of a new cut and uses a hoe of a new shape, shall I become his enemy? If he does his work better than I do mine, shall I be jealous? Do you not remember reading in the Scriptures that upon one occasion the disciples could not cast out a devil? This ought to have made them humble, but to our surprise we read a few verses further on that John and others saw one casting out devils in Christ's name, and John said, "We forbade him, because he follows not with us." *They* could not cast out the devil themselves and they forbade those who could.

A certain band of people are going about winning souls, but because they are not doing it in our fashion, we do not like it. It is true they use all sorts of strange devices and wild excitements, but they do save souls and that is the main point. Yet there are gentlemen who never converted half a soul in their lives who cry, "This is fanaticism." Go and do better before you find fault. Instead of caviling, let us encourage all on Christ's side. Wisdom is justified of her children. The laborers ought to be satisfied with the new plowman if his Master is so. Brother, if the great Lord has employed you, it is no business of mine to question His right. I do not like the look of you and cannot think how He can have such a fellow upon the farm, but as *He* has employed you, I have no right to judge you, for I dare say I look as odd in your eyes as you do in mine.

Can I lend you a hand? Can I show you how to work better? Or can you tell me something so that I may do my work better? May not the Master employ whom He pleases? If a new hoe or a new rake comes out and you that have been doing work steadily for years open your eyes and say, "I shall not use that new-fangled thing"—are you wise? Do not use the new invention if you have not tried it and can work better in your own way, but let the other man use it who finds it a handier tool. If new methods of getting a hearing for the Gospel are invented by the ingenuity of earnestness, let the brethren use them. And if we cannot imitate them, let us at least feel that we are still one, because, "One is our Master, even Christ."

This truth, however, ought to *keep all the laborers very dependent*. Are you going to preach, young man? "Yes, I am going to do a great deal of good." Are you? Have you forgotten that you are nothing? "Neither is he who plants anything." A great preacher is coming brimful of the Gospel to comfort the saints. If he is not coming in strict dependence upon God, he, too, is nothing. "Neither is he that waters anything." Power belongs unto God. Man is vanity and his words are wind—to God alone belongs

power and wisdom. If we keep our places in all lowliness, our Lord will use us, but when we exalt ourselves, He will leave us to our nothingness.

Next notice that this fact ennobles everybody who labors in God's husbandry. This passage makes my heart leap as I read it. My very soul is lifted up with joy when I mark these words, "For we are laborers together with God". We are God's fellow workers—mere laborers on His farm, but laborers with Him. Does the Lord work with us? Yes. "The Lord works with them with signs following." "My Father works hitherto, and I work," is language for all the sons of God as well as for the great Firstborn.

God is with you, brother. God is with you, sister, when you are serving Him with all your heart. Speaking to your class concerning Jesus, it is God that speaks by you. Picking up that stranger on the way and telling him of salvation by faith, Christ is speaking with you even as He spoke with the woman at the well. Addressing the rough crowd in the open air, young man, if you are preaching of pardon through the atoning blood, it is the God of Peter who is testifying of His Son even as He did on the day of Pentecost.

O brother laborers, ours is a high honor, since the Father is with us and works by us. As Mr. Wesley said, "The best of all is, God is with us." The Lord of hosts is with us and therefore we cannot fail. If we could in working with God be defeated, then God's own honor would be compromised and that cannot be.

But, lastly, *how this should drive us to our knees*. Since we are nothing without God, let us cry mightily unto Him for help in this our holy service. Let both sower and reaper pray together, or they will never rejoice together. As a church, God has blessed us so richly, that in generations to come it will be spoken of as a wonder that God should so greatly favor a congregation for so many years—but it has been wholly and alone in answer to prayer. So far from supposing that our union and prosperity are in any measure due to me, I declare that the sole cause of all the soul-winning that has been done in this place is to be found in the prayers of the saints. God in great mercy has given the spirit of prayer to you and to others who love me, and therefore I am highly favored. I am terribly afraid lest this prayerfulness should be damped down—I am jealous lest you should begin to think the preacher is something and so should fail to pray for him.

There is a thinner congregation when I am away, and therefore I am afraid that you have some reliance upon me, and do not expect a blessing if I am absent. Is it so? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect in the flesh? Have you begun to be of Spurgeon? This will never do. Brothers, this will never do. We must get rid of the tendency before it grows upon us. God can bless one man as well as another. I do not know that He always does so, but He can, and perhaps if you expected Him to do so He would do so. If you came up to this house with the same prayerfulness for others as you apportion me, you would get the same blessing. I am weakest of the weak apart from God, therefore pray for me, but others are weak too, and therefore pray for them also.

Do let us pray mightily for a blessing. Pray always. Pray in your bedchambers, at your family altars, at your work, and in your leisure, and also in this place. Come in larger numbers to pray for a blessing. We have many appointed prayer meetings, keep them all flourishing. The windows of heaven are easily opened if our mouths and hearts are opened in prayer. If the blessing be withheld, it is because we do not cry for it and expect it.

O, brother laborers, come to the mercy seat and you shall see God's farm watered from on high and tilled with divine skill, and the reapers shall soon return from the folds bringing their sheaves with them, though, perhaps, they went forth weeping to the sowing. To our Father, who is the Husbandman, be all glory, forever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—I CORINTHIANS 3

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—178, 483, 958

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